



Ontario

Booth's Rock Trail

Man and the Algonquin Environment

CA20N
NR
- Z307

Government
Publications

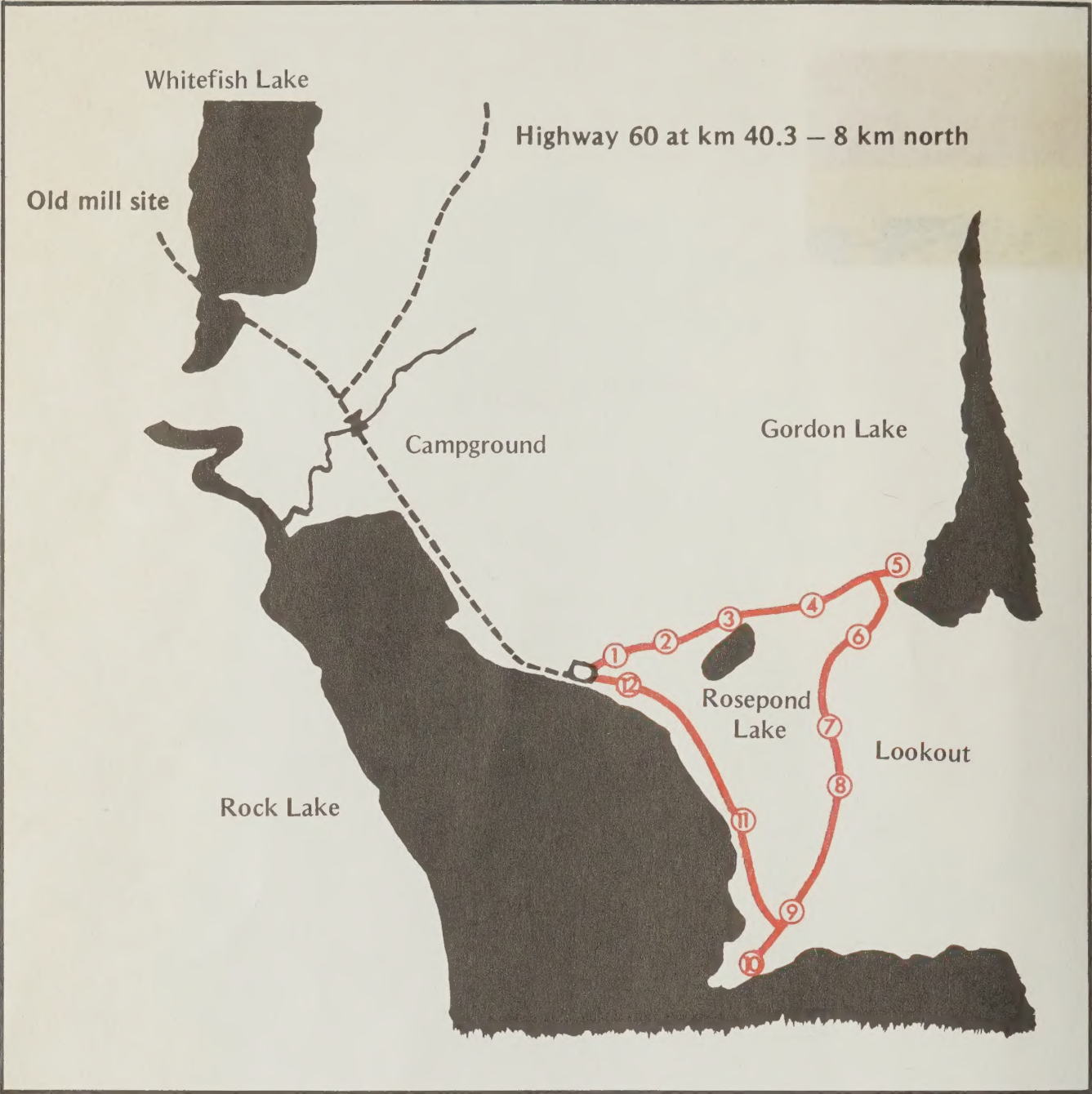
DEPOSITORY LIBRARY MATERIAL



Booth's Rock Trail

Text by Dan Strickland

Drawings by Howard Coneybeare



Booth's Rock Trail starts one kilometre south of the Rock Lake Campground office. After skirting two small lakes, it climbs to the top of a large cliff known as Booth's Rock, descends the far side of the lookout and loops back to the starting point. The trail is 5.1 km long and fairly rigorous, but may be easily covered in a couple of hours by an active person. From

the cliff top you will have a magnificent view of Rock and Whitefish lakes and several hundred square kilometres of Algonquin Park will lie before you.

The numbered sections of this guide correspond to the numbered posts along the trail and discuss some of the ways we humans have altered the Algonquin environment.

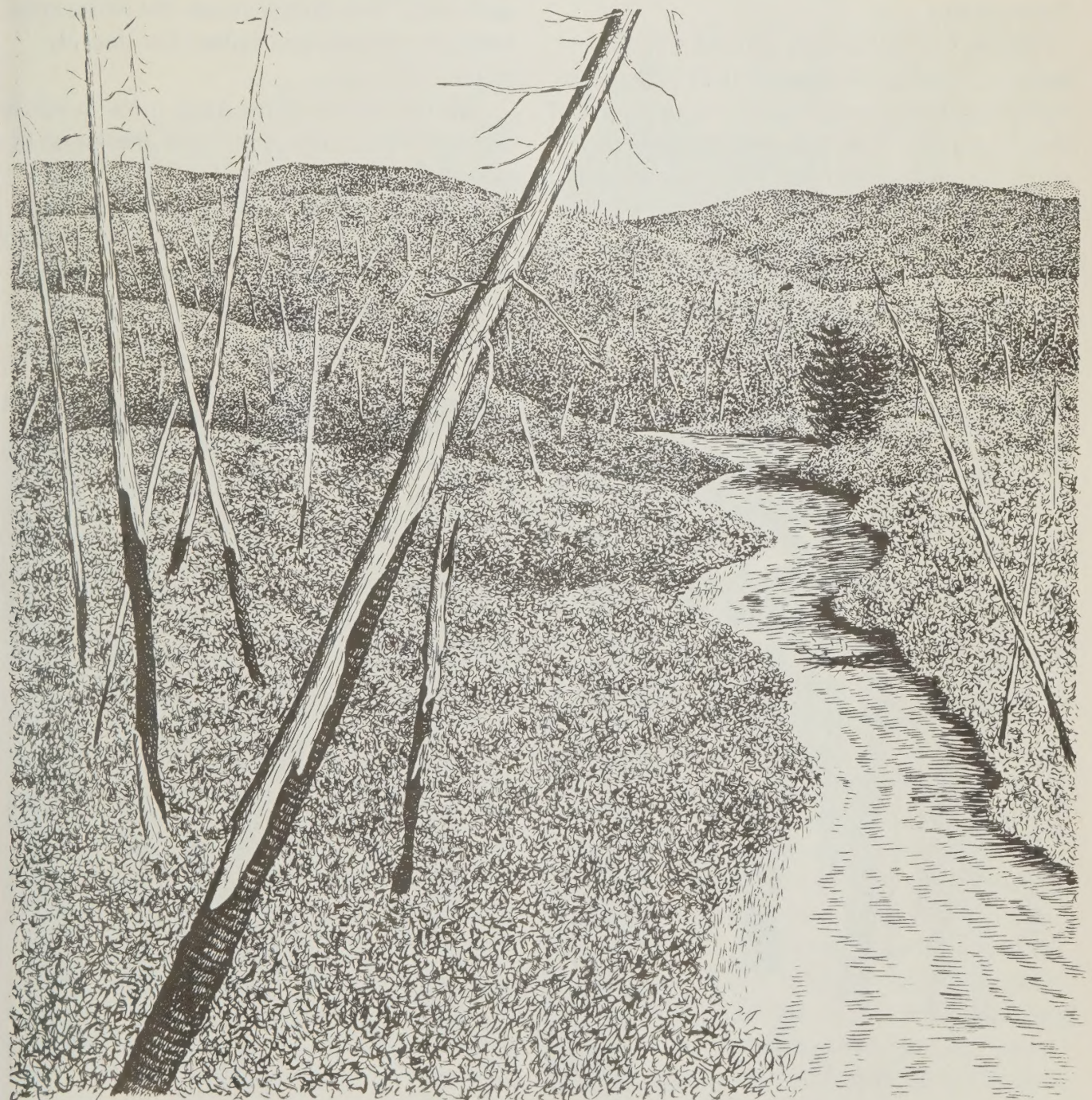
Post 1 We've Remodelled the Old Place

Many people imagine that upon reaching Algonquin Park, they are entering a completely natural environment. To be sure, the air, water, and forests are far more natural here than in the regions where most of us live. You are wrong, however, if you assume that we humans have not played a major role in shaping today's Algonquin Park.

You might wonder what is "man-made" about the forests of Algonquin. Photographs taken here around the turn of the century reveal the shrubby aftermath of early logging and subsequent uncontrolled

forest fires. The Park forests are not the pure product of thousands of years of natural development. They are in many cases young forests less than a century old and by no means identical to the ones destroyed or modified by man. What is more, virtually every living thing in Algonquin has been affected by these man-caused changes.

Some forms of life have disappeared entirely and others are completely new—unknown in the Park before the coming of the white man.



Much of Algonquin looked like this in the early 1900's.

Post 2 Of Deer, Men, and Hemlocks

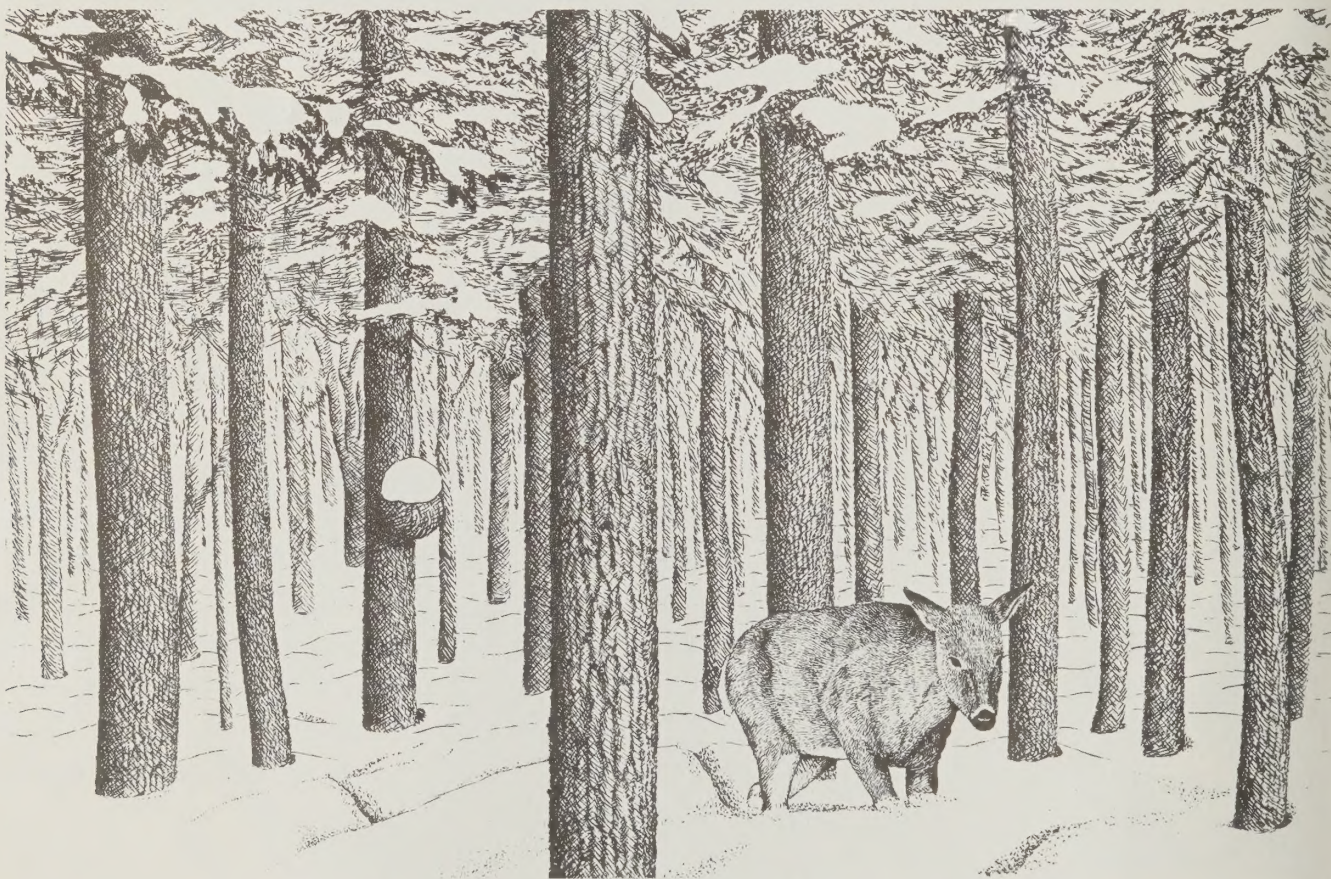
The shelter of these hemlocks is a good place to stop and think about deer, men and hemlocks—three living things whose stories are very much interwoven in Algonquin Park.

It comes as a great surprise to most people to learn that 200 years ago deer were quite rare in Algonquin Park. There were moose and very likely caribou, but deer could not thrive in the natural forests of Algonquin. There was too little food growing in the shade of the old mature forests to sustain them, especially in winter when deep snow severely restricts their movements.

When the white man arrived, things began to change. Although fires (started by lightning) had always been a natural part of the Algonquin environment, the loggers started many more fires. These were particularly devastating because of the flammable pine slash left by the lumbermen, and large areas were ravaged. Sunlight could now reach the old forest floor and a new shrubby forest clothed the land.

White-tailed Deer thrived on the new growth and spread northward along with the lumbermen. They had only one serious barrier to overcome—our snowy winters. Deer were native to southern forests with little snow where their short legs were adequate for getting about. However, here in the north deer frequently get bogged down in deep snows and not infrequently starve to death because they can't get to food. It is primarily under the cover of coniferous trees, especially hemlocks like those around you here, that the snow is not as deep and the deer can move around and feed. This shelter made the difference between success and failure for deer in Algonquin.

We will always have deep snow in winter but will there always be food and cover in quantities sufficient for the White-tailed Deer? There cannot be much doubt that the Park forests are becoming more mature and therefore less suitable for deer. Major fires are largely a thing of the past and under modern management practices log-



Deer have a hard time in the deep snow of an Algonquin winter.

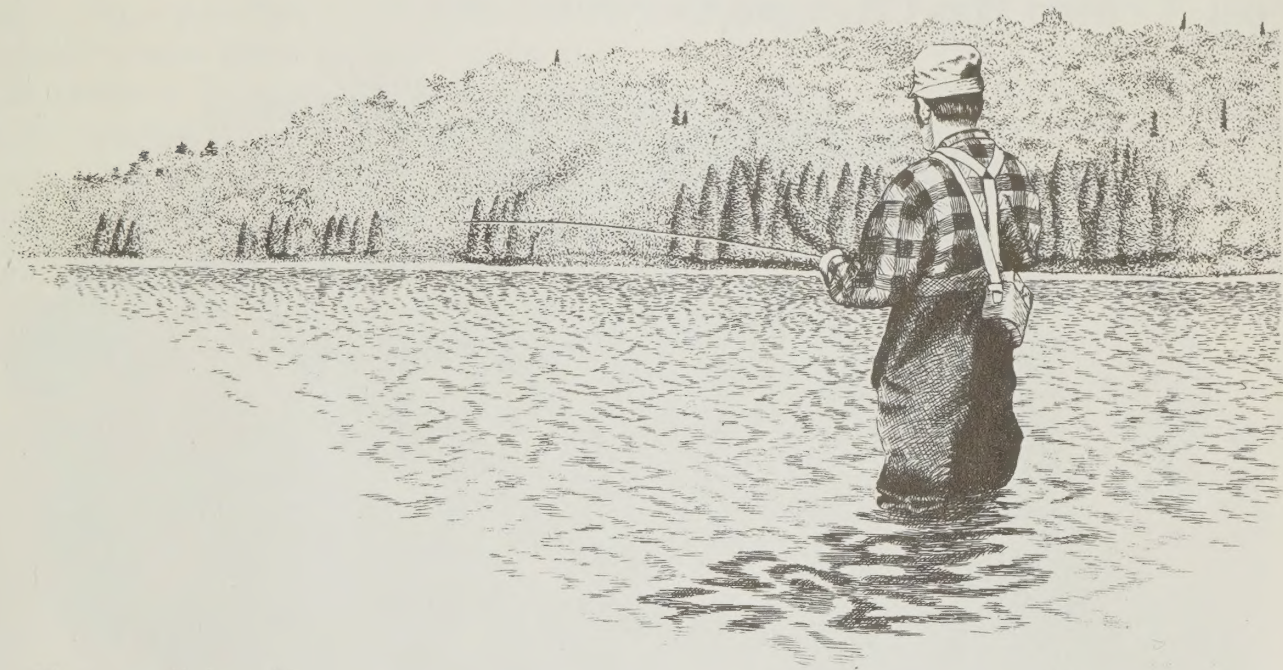
ging provides less food for deer than it did formerly.

At the same time, the cover-providing hemlocks, so important for the winter survival of deer, are diminishing in the Park. While we preserve the hemlock stands which are most frequently used as winter deer yards, other stands have been cut and they are not easily regenerated. Deer themselves are fond of browsing on young hemlocks—the very trees which could in the future provide vital winter cover for

their descendants.

In fact, deer have decreased drastically since 1960 and unless there are major disturbances in the Algonquin forests their future here is far from assured. Considering that White-tailed Deer are not native here, would their disappearance necessarily be bad? Or, would it be preferable that parts of the Park be purposely disturbed by man in order to create ideal deer conditions once again?

Post 3 Say Goodbye?



We have always found Rosepond Lake to be particularly intimate and enchanting. Hidden away from the rest of the planet by its whispering cordon of gaunt and lonely black spruce, the little lake lives a life of its own. The delicate orchids and the cool deep moss near the water's edge, the basking frogs, and the furtive schools of minnows all seem to be as remote and secure from man's troubled world as they could possibly be.

But the appearance is illusion. Within twenty years Rosepond Lake — and thousands of others in Algonquin — will almost certainly be turned so acidic by us humans that it will no longer be able to support fish, frogs, salamanders, or any of the wildlife that depends on such creatures for

food. All that will be left is a clear, almost lifeless vat of mild acid.

Such a tragedy seems unbelievable but it is really very simple. Our highly industrialized North American societies smelt ores and burn coal and oil in enormous quantities. We try to get rid of the resulting smoke and waste gases (of which sulphur and nitrogen dioxides are the most harmful) through tall smoke stacks but, even though they may travel many hundreds of kilometres, the pollutants eventually come back to earth. Usually they are washed out of the sky by rain and snow — which is why even here in Algonquin Park the rain is usually so acidic that no fish could live in it.

The only thing that has saved our park

lakes so far is their ability to neutralize the acid rain that falls into them. Unfortunately, this ability is being used up rapidly and that is why most experts predict that by the end of the century over 48,000 lakes in Ontario will be "dead" of acidification — including most of the lakes in Algonquin

Park. So it really doesn't matter that Rosepond seems to be remote and cut off from the rest of the world. The life it harbours is still in grave danger because of man-made air pollution. Perhaps you should enjoy the living Rosepond Lake and say goodbye?

Post 4 A Farm in the Forest

It takes some imagination to picture grazing cattle and crops of vegetables in the clearings between here and Gordon Lake which lies ahead, but so it was a half

century ago. There was even an orchard near the lake. This little farm was part of the Barclay Estate which you will be visiting farther along the trail.

Post 5 Man Has Changed Gordon Lake



The main trail cuts back to the right here and goes up the hill, but why not take the short path straight ahead and spend a few minutes at Gordon Lake. This lake, like many others in the southern part of Algonquin, is home (at least for the pres-

ent) to the small-mouth bass, a fish which is not native to this region. Man deliberately brought bass in around the turn of the century and there is now a self sustaining population of this "exotic" fish in Gordon Lake.

Post 6 To Catch a Wolf

For many years a tree standing by the trail near here was encircled by a piece of rusting wire. The wire was part of a wolf snare set by a ranger many years ago. When Algonquin Park was established in 1893

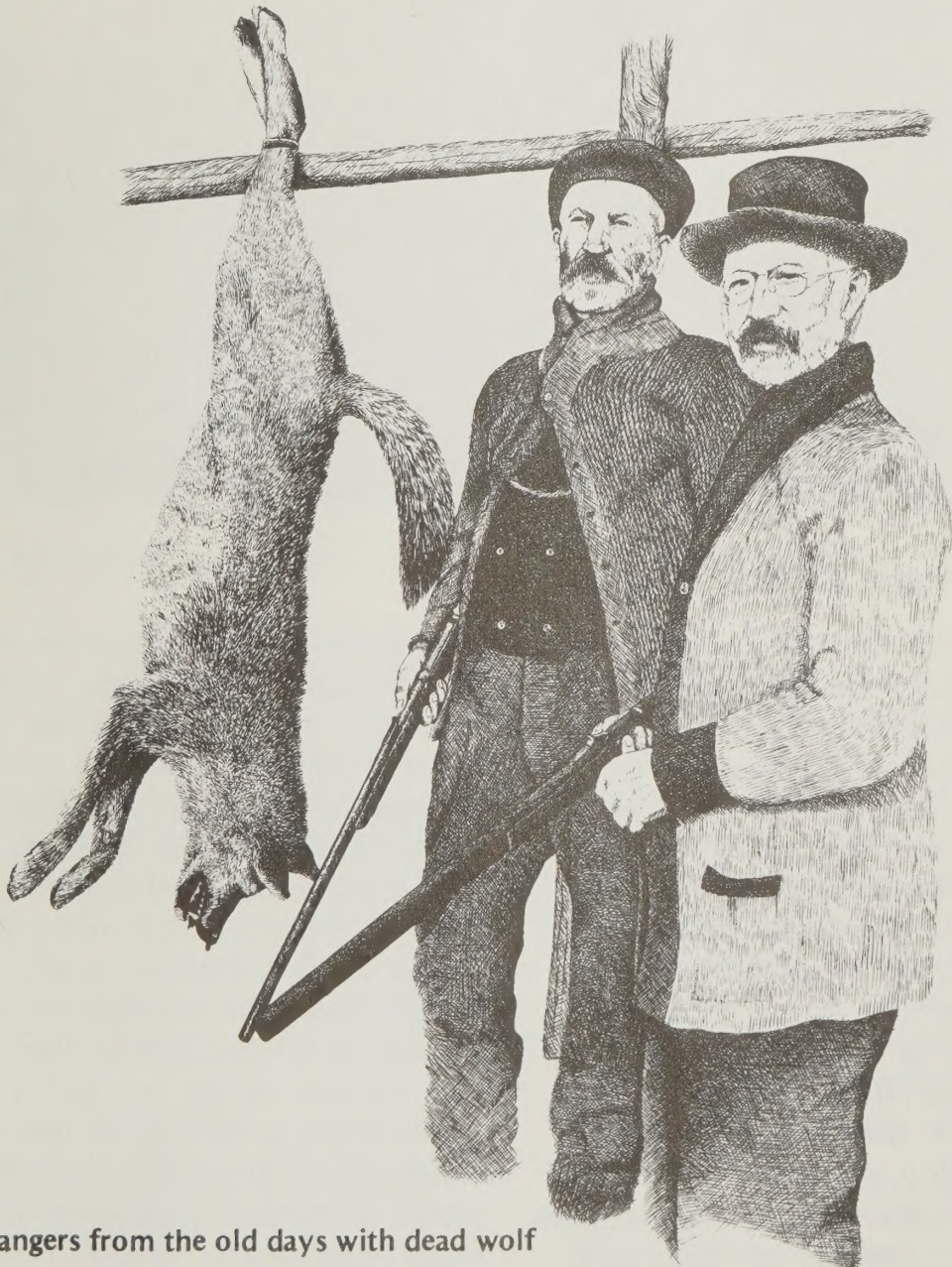
protection was given to most of the Park's animals. However, wolves were considered vermin, even by most conservationists. The object of wolf management at that time was their extermination, and snares were

set throughout the Park. Although some 50 to 60 wolves were killed every year, their numbers remained relatively stable. In 1959 the Ministry of Natural Resources began a program of research into the life of the Timber Wolf. This, and other recent work, has helped to clear away many of the fantasies told about wolves and to establish that they are a fascinating and natural part of the environment.

This knowledge came too late to save the wolf from extinction in much of the world. Even today, wolves are protected in only a handful of places and they are gone or vanishing from most of their former range in Europe, Asia, and North America. Today, Algonquin Park is one of the last accessible places where the wolf can be said to be common. Even so, you probably will not see one, but if you are here in August

you may hear a pack. It was discovered in the wolf research program that wolves will howl in answer to human imitations of their voice. Every August we make a special effort to locate a pack near the highway and then take visitors to hear them. The response of Park visitors to these "Public Wolf Howls" leaves little doubt that the wolf itself is converting its deadly enemy—man—into its most appreciative listener.

Before we move on, it is interesting to note that for most of Algonquin Park's recent history the staple diet of wolves has been White-tailed Deer — an animal which was here largely due to man's interference with nature. Before this period of unnatural deer abundance, however, moose and beaver must have dominated the wolf's bill of fare — as they do once again today.



Two park rangers from the old days with dead wolf



Post 7 We are in the Picture

Rock Lake

Many park visitors make an annual trip up here to marvel at the spectacular view of the Algonquin landscape. In fact, the view is so breathtaking, and so different from what you see back home, that many people assume that the country stretching out to the horizon is “primeval wilderness”. But however wild the landscape may seem, there are reminders even here of man’s enormous influence.

At the foot of Whitefish Lake, for example, not far from the Rock Lake Campground, a sawmill operated until 1979. Although it was replaced that year by a new mill in the village of Whitney, the wood used still comes from Algonquin

Park, transported by truck on over 1500 km of interior logging roads. Logging has been going on in Algonquin for well over a century and the forests we see today are different as a result of this activity. One notable difference is that almost all of the giant white pine which used to tower above the smaller hardwood trees are now gone.

But today’s forestry practices have changed from the old days when loggers had almost a free hand to take whatever they wanted and no one gave a thought to the consequences. Now, the approximately three quarters of Algonquin Park zoned for timber production is under forest management. This is a responsibility



Campground

Old mill site

Whitefish Lake

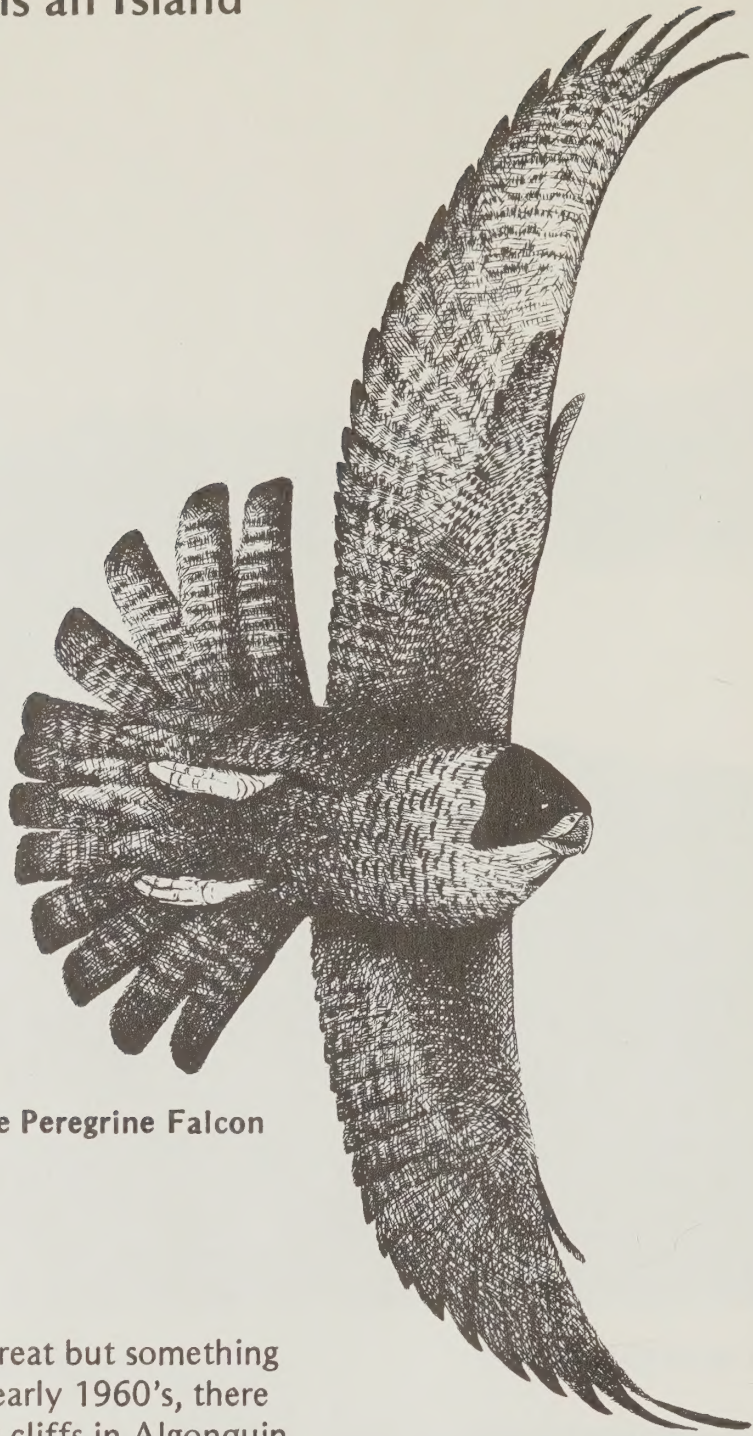
of the Ministry of Natural Resources and its aim is to establish future crops of commercially valuable trees and to see that they are cut in such a way that a new crop of valuable trees will succeed the cut ones as quickly as possible. In this way it is hoped that the managed forests of Ontario will continue to produce the same high volume of forest products forever. Algonquin Park accounts for 20 percent of the total timber production of southern Ontario.

Logging is one influence we humans have on Algonquin Park and simply coming to enjoy it is another. Every year more than 50,000 people travel on Algonquin's

waterways (including Rock Lake, 120 metres below you) and such large numbers inevitably mean a considerable impact on the Park's portages and campsites. For example, the annual bill for cleaning up the garbage left by interior travellers went above \$100,000 a long time ago, and that is one of the reasons why cans and bottles are now banned in the Park Interior.

So, even if the country spread out below you is beautiful and spectacular, it cannot be called wilderness. We humans have been, and still are, very much in the picture.

Post 8 No Park is an Island



We are trying to bring the Peregrine Falcon back to Algonquin.

The scenery up here is great but something is missing. Up until the early 1960's, there nested on this and other cliffs in Algonquin a creature justly famed as the very embodiment of aerodynamic perfection. The Peregrine Falcon, the bird prized since antiquity by royal falconers, the bird which, at speeds of 300 km per hour, dropped like a thunderbolt to rip its feathered prey from the air. Not so long ago you might have stood here and marvelled at the fantastic aerial displays of the Peregrine — towering dives, dramatic cliff-length barrel rolls, figure eights — all at incredible speed.

These wonderful sights cannot be seen now and may never be seen again from this spot because we humans have all but

annihilated the once proud falcon in North America. We did it by pouring DDT on our crops, not realizing that the DDT or its equally poisonous breakdown products are very long lasting and, when eaten by an animal, tend to stay in that animal's body permanently. Small birds from Algonquin and even more remote areas became contaminated when they spent the winter in southern areas where DDT was being used intensively. When they flew north, the

small birds took the poison with them in their bodies so that even in places like Algonquin (where little or no DDT was ever used) a falcon could not avoid eating pesticides. Even worse was the fact that with every meal, the Peregrine got (and therefore kept) the entire load of DDT that the prey had taken a whole lifetime to accumulate in its body.

Falcons were not killed outright by the rapidly increasing poison levels in their bodies, but the concentration usually did reach the point where the females could not lay normal eggs. The shells became so thin that the eggs were broken before the eggs could hatch. The adults ceased to reproduce, and the falcon seemed doomed in most of North America. Fortunately, two small breeding groups were kept alive in captivity in both the U.S. and Canada, and in 1969 the use of DDT was drastically curtailed. Pesticide levels in traditional prey species have dropped to the point where attempts to reintroduce Peregrines to the wild are now being made using young birds produced from the captive breeding stocks. Algonquin is one of the places where young birds are raised each summer on traditional nesting cliffs (al-

though not this one) with the hope that the birds will eventually return to breed and raise wild young of their own. It is too early to know if the attempt will succeed. We don't know for sure that DDT levels are now low enough, and even in the best of circumstances the survival of young falcons is low. About all we can do is keep trying and keep hoping.

In earlier editions of this booklet we expressed fears that the Common Loon would follow the Peregrine Falcon into local extinction because its eggs also were becoming thinner-shelled. Now, with the reduction in DDT use, this threat seems to have eased but, sadly, another even more serious one is emerging. The acid rain we discussed back at Post 3 threatens to make most Algonquin lakes uninhabitable for fish before the end of the century, and without fish of course there can be no loons

It is a mistake to assume, as some people do, that wildlife will live happily ever after in our "wilderness" parks no matter what we do elsewhere on our continent. The truth is that there are no havens at all from the dangers of long-lived pesticides and airborne chemical pollution.



The Loon's food supply is seriously threatened by the acid rain which now falls on Algonquin.

Post 9

You have now made your way back to Rock Lake and are standing directly opposite the entrance to the old Barclay Estate. The main trail turns to the right

here but we invite you to take a few minutes to walk around the old estate grounds and enjoy some of the history of the place.

Post 10 Here Lived the Judge



Men-wah-tay, the caretaker's house at the Barclay estate

Judge George Barclay was a relative of J. R. Booth, a lumberman responsible for much of the early logging we have been discussing along the trail. The estate was established here around the turn of the century and was occupied for the last time in the summer of 1953. Slowly the scene is being taken over again by forest, but the foundations of the various houses and storage sheds may be discovered with ease. The dock and tennis court are in remarkably good repair.

The gardeners among you will feel at

home on these grounds. Many plants such as day-lilies, Norway Spruce and lilacs still grow here. These plants are familiar to city backyards, but they are hardly a part of the original Algonquin environment. Perhaps 100 or more alien plants have been introduced to the Park by man. In fact, along the highway during the summer, a majority of the conspicuous flowers are European species accidentally introduced to North America by man. Of course roadsides themselves are an environment unknown here before the white man.

Post 11 All Aboard!

For the last few minutes you have been walking on an historic feature of Algonquin Park and a striking example of man's impact on Algonquin. Believe it or not, you are standing on what was once the busiest railroad in all of Canada!

Let your mind slip back to the 1890's when the railroad was being constructed from Ottawa to Georgian Bay under the impetus of Algonquin's most famous lumber baron, J. R. Booth. Picture men dynamiting the rockcut, and the struggle with sand and gravel required to build these steep-sided track beds. Picture the

countless locomotives steaming down the track hauling timber from Algonquin Park or grain from western Canada. During World War I it is said there was a train every twenty minutes.

Today, the scene is quite different. Until very recently, trains still came once a week as far as Whitney 15 km back down the track, but this section has not been used since 1944. Even so, it will take generations for the track to be completely grown over, and the rockcuts will be obvious long after that.



J. R. Booth with his two sons inspect special load of square timber from the park in 1924

Post 12

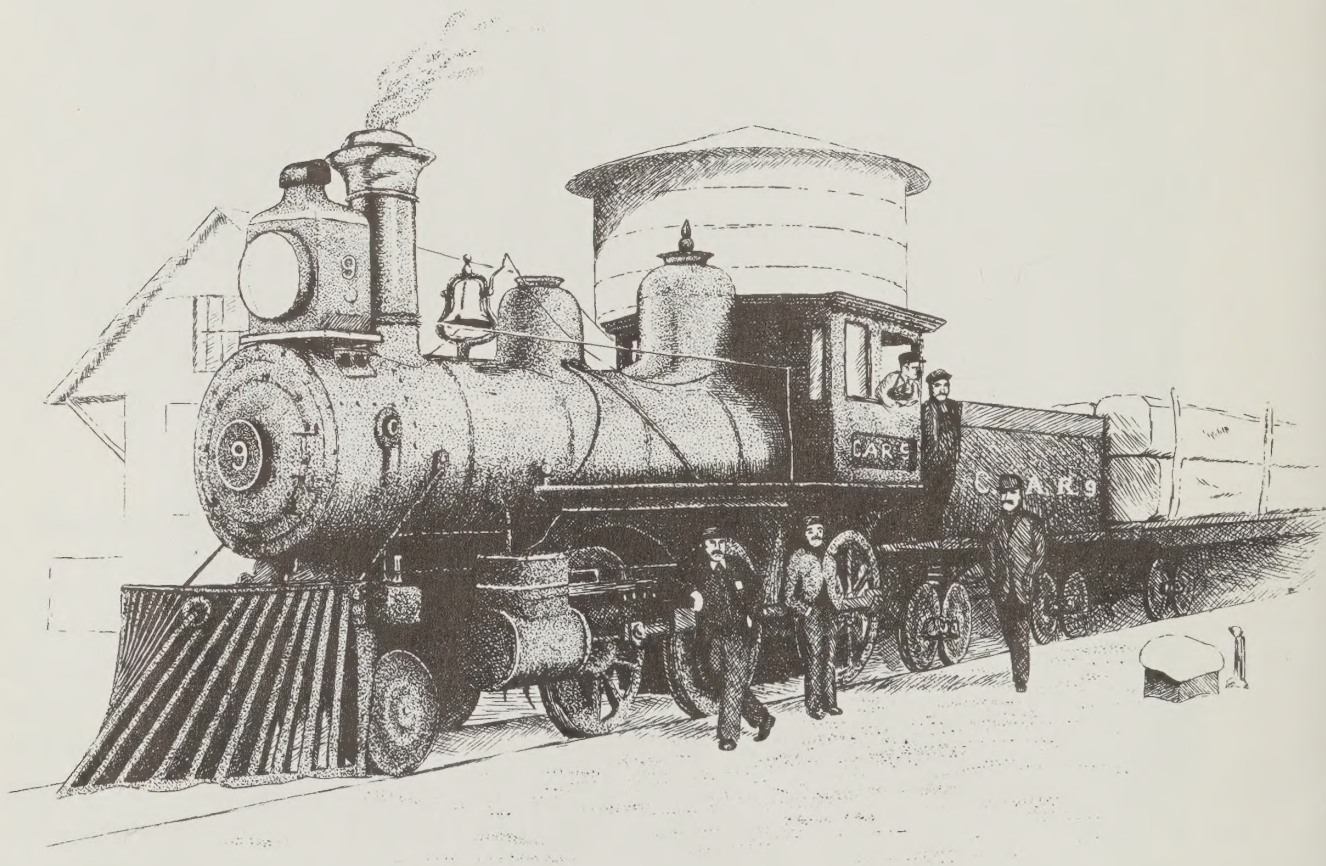
Railways, lilacs, acid rain, poisoned birds, snared wolves, old farms, logging, and garbage are not the characteristics of a wilderness. Rather, they are indicators of the ways we human beings have been changing the Algonquin environment for the last 150 years.

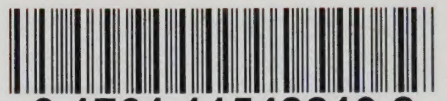
Today, Algonquin is managed as an area of outstanding recreational opportunities and as a valuable source of timber upon which the economy of the Park region is largely dependent.

We hope you have enjoyed your hike around the trail and that you will appreciate better the role we humans have played and are playing in Algonquin Provincial Park.

If you do not intend to take this guide home with you please put it in the box at this post so that others may use it later. If you wish to keep the guide, please pay at the trail entrance sign if you have not already done so. Thank you.

Other Algonquin trails are listed on the back cover.





3 1761 11548219 2

OTHER ALGONQUIN TRAILS

This is just one of nine trails maintained in the Highway 60 region of Algonquin Provincial Park. Each is designed to introduce you to some specific aspect of the Park and each has a guide similar to this one.

The eight other trails are listed below (distances are from the West Gate).

WHISKEY RAPIDS TRAIL (AT KM 7.2) This trail is a 2.1 km loop leading along the Oxtongue River to Whiskey Rapids. The trail guide discusses the ecology and history of an Algonquin river.

HARDWOOD LOOKOUT TRAIL (AT KM 16.7) This 0.8 km walk takes you through a typical Algonquin hardwood forest and culminates in a fine view of Smoke Lake and the surrounding maple hills. The guide offers some insight into the ecology of a hardwood forest.

PECK LAKE TRAIL (AT KM 19.2) The Peck Lake Trail is 1.9 km long and goes completely around the shoreline of Peck Lake before returning you to the parking lot. The trail guide explores the ecology of a typical Algonquin lake.

TWO RIVERS TRAIL (AT KM 31.0) The Two Rivers Trail is 2.1 km long, making an easy ascent to a pine-clad cliff overlooking the north branch of the Madawaska River. The guide examines the importance of change in the natural and present day Algonquin forests.

HEMLOCK BLUFF TRAIL (AT KM 27.2) This loop trail, 3.5 km long through mixed hardwood and coniferous forest, leads to an impressive view of Jack Lake. The trail guide discusses the importance of Algonquin Park as a living laboratory for research in a variety of different fields.

LOOKOUT TRAIL (AT KM 39.7) This 1.9 km loop is a fairly steep and rugged trail which rewards the hiker with a magnificent view of several hundred square kilometres of Algonquin. The trail guide discusses the geology of the Park.

SPRUCE BOG BOARDWALK (AT KM 42.5) This unusual 1.5 km loop takes you through the best bog situation in the Highway 60 area. It is provided with several extensive boardwalk sections and gives the Algonquin visitor an excellent close-up look at the flora and fauna of two typical northern spruce bogs. The trail guide relates the history and ecology of the bogs.

BEAVER POND TRAIL (AT KM 45.2) A winding trail of 2.0 km through rugged hilly country yields close-up views of two beaver ponds, including a fine, bird's eye view from a rocky bluff. The trail guide provides an introduction to Algonquin's fascinating beaver pond ecology.



Ontario

Ministry of
Natural
Resources